District Review Report

School District No. 84 (Vancouver Island West)

March 1-3, 2004

Submitted to the Minister of Education

By District Review Team Chair
Ron Samborski, Superintendent, School District No. 60 (Peace River North)

District Review Report

2003/2004

District Name:	Vancouver Island West
District Number:	84
Superintendent:	Andris Freimanis
Date of Visit:	February 29-March 3, 2004
Team Chair:	Ron Samborski, Superintendent, School District No. 60 (Peace River North)
Team Members:	Dana Arthurs, Parent, SD 79 (Cowichan Valley) Anne Cooper, Superintendent, SD 19 (Revelstoke) Jim Gaskill, Assessment Department, Ministry of Education Wendy Hyer, Principal, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Lori Robinson, Teacher, SD 58 (Nicola-Similkameen) Trish Rosborough, Provincial Coordinator, Ministry of Education

Context

School District No. 84 (Vancouver Island West) serves 515 students, of which 33% have Aboriginal ancestry. Twenty-two per cent of the total student population is designated as having special needs. Students attend five schools on the west coast of Vancouver Island in four distinct communities: Gold River, Kyuquot, Zeballos and Tahsis. The three latter communities are accessible by gravel road, boat and/or plane. All schools and the district are served by electronic communications.

The District has been faced with significant enrollment declines (35% since 98/99) primarily in the two Communities of Tahsis and Gold River. The declines have posed challenges to school and district structures, staff organization and community based services that supported students.

The District's current surplus has provided some opportunity to mitigate the loss of revenue from the declining student population. The School District employs 42 teachers (38.7 teaching assignments), 7 principals and vice-principals, approximately 40 CUPE support staff and a District staff consisting of a Superintendent, Secretary-Treasurer, Special Education Coordinator, and two excluded staff.

Summary of Process

The External Team met Sunday evening with the Superintendent to gain some insights into the District and the communities it serves. The formal review began on Monday with an overview of district programs, services, initiatives and insights by various groups including: school Principals, the Operations Supervisor, the Secretary-Treasurer, three Trustees, the District Special Education Coordinator, the Gold River Aboriginal Learning Facilitator, representatives of two School Parent Advisory Councils, representatives of the Tsaxana Band Education Committee, and the Presidents of the Vancouver Island West Teachers' Union and CUPE Local 2769.

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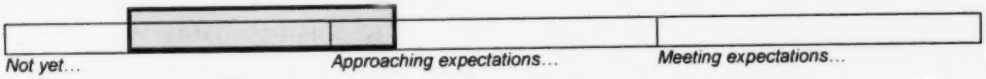
Members of the Team visited each community and met with the five School Planning Councils to gain an appreciation of the unique context of each school and its community. The Team spent between 2 and 4 hours at each site where they reviewed the School Improvement Plans and discussed its relationship with the District Accountability Contract.

Team members visited with the members of the Tsaxana and Uklagee aboriginal community, and met with the Tsaxana Education committee.

Additional data considered: The Team considered a wide range of district and school level data tables related to the performance of students on provincial examinations and tests.

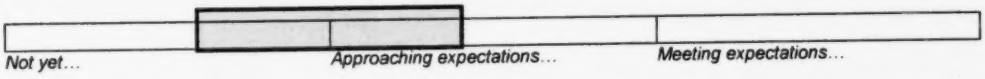
Observations in Key Areas - Focus on Student Achievement

1. *Goals:*
   Improving districts and schools have a strong instructional focus. This focus is made visible in relevant goals for improving achievement for all students.



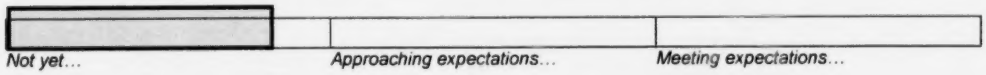
   - The District has articulated two goals that are linked to student learning. The Team views the reference to technology as more of a strategy to accomplish the District's goals.
   - The format of the District Accountability Contract is difficult to understand.
   - Reducing the number of goals and identifying specific objectives in district and school plans will allow for greater instructional focus.

2. *Rationale:*
   Improving districts and schools have a thorough and connected set of reasons, **based on evidence**, for the selection of their student achievement goals.



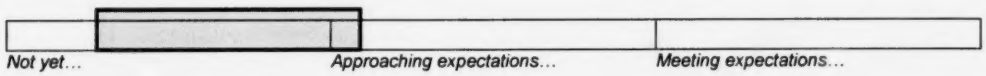
   - There is clear evidence that Aboriginal student achievement needs to be specifically addressed.
   - The rationales for district and school goals are based primarily on perceptions rather than district and classroom based evidence.

3. *Data:*
Improving districts and schools are actively considering at least three sources of evidence including classroom, school, district and provincial data. The analysis of this evidence informs the selection of the district goals and is used to monitor progress.



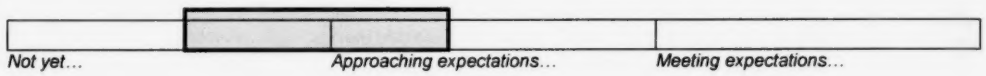
- Some schools recognize the need to further expand their use of student achievement data to monitor progress.
- Criteria for including and excluding students in any particular assessment are not clear.
- Read-Well data that is being tracked at the school level is a good example of linking data to goals.
- For the most part, schools and the District are struggling in their collection and analysis of data to monitor student performance, to inform teacher practice and develop improvement plans.

4. *Strategies:*
Improving districts and schools have well-organized, focused improvement plans in place. The strategies selected to achieve the goals are an intelligent blend of research, best practice, and innovative thinking.



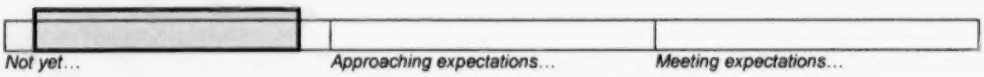
- There are no district-wide strategies for reaching literacy and numeracy goals.
- The Team has not observed much sharing of best practice strategies between schools. Schools expressed a desire to work collaboratively and share knowledge and skills.
- For the most part, School Improvement Plans have not articulated strategies that focus on enhancement of instructional practice.

5. *Structures:*
Improving districts and schools have aligned structures – resources, time, organizations – to get the results they want. This includes, but is not limited to, effectively differentiating resources in the areas of highest need for improvement.



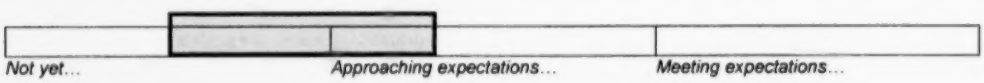
- A number of schools have changed structures to support their goals.
- The District promotes school autonomy by allowing schools to allocate resources in ways appropriate to their individual needs. This is both a strength and a weakness as the district has very limited capacity to direct resources to areas of highest need.

6. *Results:*
Improving districts and schools get improved results – at the classroom, school and district levels.



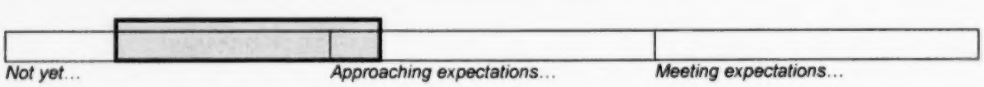
- The District is in initial stages of developing procedures for tracking results.
- Targets have not been clearly articulated in most school plans.
- Until baseline data are established for individuals, groups and schools, changes cannot be identified.
- There is strong evidence that schools and parents want to improve results for students.

7. *Communication:*
Improving districts and schools are involved in continuous dialogue about student achievement and make public their improvement goals and the progress being made in specific areas of focus.



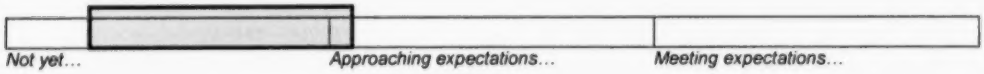
- Some schools are establishing communication between/with their diverse communities.
- There is no evidence of a comprehensive district communication plan with respect to student learning.
- Schools appreciate the liaison function trustees provide in the District.
- The District and Aboriginal communities have expressed a strong desire for the establishment of an Aboriginal Education Council.

8. *Teamwork – District and School Coherence*:
Improving districts and schools have an interactive strategy for connecting school and district goals. School uniqueness and school district directions are both valued.



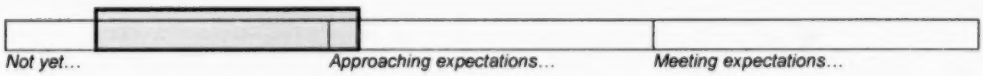
- There does not appear to be a sustained opportunity for purposeful dialogue among educational stakeholders regarding District Accountability Contract and School Improvement Plans.
- The District and all school plans are varied and lack coherence.
- Some schools express a desire to work together and share in the development of school plans, instructional strategies, and the use of assessment tools.

9. *Teamwork – District and Parent Involvement*:
   Improving districts and schools work as a team with parents, including specific groups of parents, to improve student achievement.



- The District is in the early stages of implementing School Planning Councils.
- The District has not established practices for collaborating and consulting with the Aboriginal communities for improving student achievement.
- Some School Planning Councils have begun working with their data and others will need support in this area.
- There is no district-wide mechanism for involving parents in a meaningful dialogue about student achievement.

10. *Leadership / Teamwork:*
    Leaders in improving districts and schools have a clear vision for, and commitment, to improving achievement for all students. Leadership at all levels, in all roles, is encouraged and systematically developed in a collaborative learning community with a focus on improving student achievement.



- Collaboration is shown in some schools and at some levels in the system.
- There is a well-established administrative Leadership Team in the District.
- There does not appear to be a plan for extending leadership capacity building to teachers, support staff, parents and students.

Strengths

Team observations of particular strengths related to student achievement at specific schools.

1. Willingness of parents and community to be involved and provide support to the schools
2. Loyal staff who care about the social and emotional well being of their students
3. Significant contributions made by volunteers on a daily, monthly and weekly basis
4. Staff involvement in the life of the community despite challenging circumstances
5. Workshops planned and delivered by community members to enhance understanding of educational issues
6. The completely volunteer full lunch program at Captain Meares elementary school in Tahsis

Promising Practices

District or school practices that could be helpful to other distr icts with a similar focus.

1. Restructuring the school day to provi de time for collaboration.
2. The pretest snack program at Gold River Secondary School.
3. The LEAP program to support students with significant academic deficits.
4. The incorporation of the Read-Well program.
5. Tracking the head start students.

Recommendations

Team recommendations for strengthening school and district focus on student achievement and for improving results.

The External Team recommends that:

1. The District Accountability Contract be reformatted and refined to better articulate goals, objectives, targets, strategies, structures and results. The Ministry can be of assistance to provide samples and provide in-service.
2. The District develops a common template for schools to use in developing S chool Improvement Plans.
3. The District allocates the necessary human, financial and staff development resources to support the goals established in the District Accountability Contract and School Improvement Plans.
4. The District works with the Aboriginal communities to develop Aborigi nal Education Council.
5. The District acknowledge the concern around the use of quantitative data by working collaboratively with teachers and other stakeholders to review the types , amounts and scope of data collected to date to set baselines and inform progress towards goal achievement. This includes developing a facility for working with data.
6. The District pursues implementing a comprehensive early intervention program.
7. The District capitalizes on the strong desire of staff and parents to move forward with higher expectations for student achievement.
8. The District provides opportunities for district collaboration utilizing the exper ience and expertise of innovative teachers, administrators, parents and community members.
9. The District commit to leadership development and capacity building across a broad spectrum of education stakeholders to support the enhancement of learning.
10. The District incorporate the consistent use of performance standards for instructional planning, assessment and evaluation in order to ensure standards of expectation that are consistent for all students and further that parents and students be thoroughly introduced to these standards.

Priorities

Team identification of areas needing immediate attention.

The team recommends that the district give priority to addressing recom mendations one and two on a priority basis:

1. The District Accountability Contract be reformatted and refined to better articulate goals, objectives, targets, strategies, structures and results. The Ministry can be of assistance to provide samples and provide in-service.

2. The District develops a common template for schools to use in developing S chool Improvement Plans.